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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Implementation of agreed conclusions 1999/2 on the development of Africa: implementation and coordinated follow-up by the United Nations system of initiatives on African development

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. At its substantive session of 1999, the Economic and Social Council considered the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Development of Africa: implementation of the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council and the General Assembly, specifically the implementation and coordinated follow-up by the United Nations system of initiatives on Africa" (A/54/133-E/1999/79). A set of agreed conclusions were adopted by the Council and endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 54/234. The present report reviews the progress in the implementation of the recommendations contained in agreed conclusions 1999/2.

II. Recommendations and activities

2. The sections below contain recommendations on coherence and consistency of coordination mechanisms, ownership of development assistance and *global and regional coordination of initiatives*.

A. Coherence and consistency of coordination mechanisms

3. The Council recommended that:

Organizations of the United Nations system try to build coherence among such initiatives (recent United Nations programming and coordination mechanisms) and, to the extent possible, consolidate these initiatives through enhanced overall cooperation and collaboration, while taking into account their respective mandates.

4. More than any other region, Africa can benefit from improved coordination, especially as it relates to increasing the effectiveness of development assistance to the region. The principal modality for increased efficiency continues to be the promotion of coherent United Nations system support for countries in Africa, with a view to strengthening national capacity and supporting the integrated and coordinated follow-up to the major international conferences of the 1990s. The United Nations Development Group plays an important role in this effort. Coordination mechanisms developed

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to harmonize development assistance provided by the United Nations system and interface with Governments include the resident coordinator system, the common country assessment, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and thematic groups. The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, which is the implementation arm of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, is also a mechanism for coordination which is specific to Africa.

5. The resident coordinator system is a key coordination instrument at the country level. In countries where humanitarian emergencies are acute, the humanitarian coordinator plays an important role as well. In countries where there are complex emergencies, the work of the resident coordinator and/or the humanitarian coordinator has to be dovetailed with that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and with the peace-building support offices and other political or peacekeeping missions, on the understanding that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General takes the lead in political and peace-building work, and leaves operational activities for development to the resident coordinator and the country team.

6. The common country assessment is a collaborative country-based process for reviewing and analysing the national development situation based on a strategic approach and forms the basis for the preparation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework document. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework is a strategic planning and programming framework that identifies common challenges and responses of the United Nations system for greater impact. By the end of 2000, it is envisaged that 44 common country assessments and 19 United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks will be completed in Africa.

7. Thematic groups, often initially established as follow-up to global conferences, have become crucial in the formulation and implementation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. Among the most successful are the groups on the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), disaster management, gender and food security. Theme groups are tools for assessing and monitoring the level of commitment and harmonization on goals, and in identifying areas where gaps and opportunities exist.

8. With respect to country coverage, it should be noted that Special Initiative programmes are designed to be demand driven. Countries demonstrate their ownership of the various programmes by taking initiatives to be included in the various subprogrammes. The cluster concept of the Special Initiative, which assigns specific responsibility to agencies either as coordinating or cooperating agencies, provides the opportunity for effective coordination and coherence. While conceptually similar to thematic groups, the Special Initiative clusters explicitly and formally include the Bretton Woods institutions. The clusters in the priority areas of education, health, information technology, governance and gender and population have made notable contributions in terms of coordinated actions. The partnerships under Special Initiative are broad-based, including not only the United Nations system and Governments but also local communities, non-governmental organizations and other bilateral and multilateral agencies.

9. In the education cluster, under the leadership of the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a joint strategy for 16 low-enrolment countries has been developed and joint consultative meetings and support for the preparation of education sector development plans have been provided to African countries. The Special Initiative health component, coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, focuses on support to countries for the preparation and implementation of sector-wide programmes of health reforms at the country level so that quality, cost-effective and sustainable packages of basic health services can be made available. In the cluster on harnessing information technology for development, under the leadership of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), national information and communication infrastructure plans have been approved in 10 countries, and 12 countries are in the process of preparing such plans.

10. The large number of conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa continue to affect severely the environment for development and pose a special challenge to the functioning of coordination instruments. At the same time, the very challenges

facing the country team can prove to be an effective and stimulating basis for the development of its spirit. However, many countries are facing the prospect of a steep decrease in assistance once humanitarian activities decline, which seriously diminishes their chances of ensuring a smooth transition from crisis to development.

11. A number of country teams have been actively working on coordinated responses to situations that fluctuate between crisis and development, or where the prospects of renewed crisis are considerable. It is difficult in these situations to adhere to a single strategic or programming framework. The country teams have usually tried to adapt the guidelines from headquarters to the particular country situation. A number of them follow a consolidated appeals process, but they are at the same time considering ways of applying the common country assessment and eventually moving forward to an adapted or modified United Nations Development Assistance Framework. In some cases, such an adaptation (relying on the common country assessment for fundamental analysis, and preparing for both the consolidated appeals process at the emergency end and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework at the development end) appears to be working. In the case of Somalia, the main programming instrument used is the consolidated appeals process, which has been elaborated into a tool for initial developmental programming. The strategic framework approach, which provides overall guidance to the United Nations team, bringing together the political, human rights and assistance elements of the United Nations response to countries in crisis, has been adopted in one country in Africa, Sierra Leone. The relationship among all these mechanisms requires further work, including with instruments such as the comprehensive development framework and the poverty reduction strategy papers promoted by the World Bank.

12. In addition to the coordination frameworks identified above, there are a number of other examples of collaboration at the country level in Africa. Gender, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, girls' education, poverty reduction, food security and disaster mitigation are examples of issues where collaboration crosses organizational boundaries to include different partners, various regions and a mixture of coordination instruments. Joint programming has taken root in Mozambique, for example, where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) work jointly in the area of gender empowerment and development. Funding for this initiative was obtained through the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is working with the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Africa through the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) network on rural development and food security. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and UNFPA are jointly providing emergency reproductive health services to displaced persons and refugees in several countries. Censuses and demographic and health surveys are being carried out in a number of countries in Africa, with assistance from UNFPA, often in collaboration with other funds and programmes, the World Bank and donors including the European Union, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan and Norway. UNFPA also actively participates in sectoral initiatives such as sector-wide approaches in the health and education sectors in Ethiopia and Ghana and under the health sector investment programme, in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank and other donors.

13. Some agencies are working directly with regional and subregional organizations. FAO participates in the policy and technical meetings of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and maintains a permanent inter-secretariat dialogue facilitated by the ECA Liaison Unit. It is also working closely with OAU and subregional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Arab Maghreb Union on agricultural development and food security strategies. WFP also participates in the meetings of subregional organizations such as IGAD on humanitarian aspects of conflict resolution in the Horn of Africa, with SADC on improving early warning systems, and with the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel on drought mitigation measures. It also makes use of analysis produced by regional commissions when preparing projects, programmes or regional emergency operations.

14. The Council requested:

> **The United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as other multilateral and regional organizations and bilateral donors, to collaborate with national Governments and among themselves, in order to ensure consistency of the various coordination mechanisms, to create synergy, avoid duplication and contradictions and simplify, as appropriate, modalities and procedures required for the functioning of those mechanisms.**

15. Significant effort has been put into ensuring the consistency of the various coordination mechanisms, including the common country assessment, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa and the comprehensive development framework. United Nations country teams have held retreats in several countries to ensure that the programmes under the Special Initiative framework have been fully integrated into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. In addition, the Special Initiative secretariat, working closely with the United Nations Development Group, has developed specific guidelines for inclusion in the outline for the 1999 annual report of the United Nations resident coordinators. These guidelines will be improved upon in the future.

16. The comprehensive development framework, launched in early 1999, is a framework for national Governments to decide on their own priorities and programmes and is an instrument for improved coordination of development assistance. It emphasizes partnerships between Government, civil society, including the private sector, and other development partners. Another development with potential implications for coordination is the new poverty reduction strategy papers, which will become the framework for country-led poverty reduction programmes to be monitored by the Bretton Woods institutions. The poverty reduction strategy papers were endorsed by the Development Committee of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as the framework for strengthening the link between debt relief and poverty reduction in the context of the Enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative launched in September 1999.

17. Overall, there is good collaboration between the United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions at the country level. The Bretton Woods institutions are members of the country teams and, in that capacity, usually participate in the common country assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes. In some countries, the resident coordinator and the World Bank co-chair the monthly development assistance group meetings, which serve as the main donor coordination mechanism on development issues (for example, in Ethiopia) and, on occasion, the Bank's representative has temporarily played a coordinating role for the United Nations system, chairing weekly meetings of the country team (in Eritrea).

18. With regard to the integration of the various frameworks, considerable effort is being made to ensure that the various coordination mechanisms are working harmoniously and are mutually reinforcing. Since its introduction in early 1999, the comprehensive development framework concept has been introduced to the various United Nations country teams in Africa. In addition, as a follow-up to the meeting on 19 May 1999, between the Deputy Secretary-General and the Managing Director of the World Bank, a United Nations system World Bank learning group on the comprehensive development framework was established to collectively monitor its implementation in pilot countries and to reach a common understanding of the practical application of the principles that govern the framework, namely, a long-term, holistic vision, country ownership, partnership and focus on development outcomes. With the introduction of the poverty reduction strategy papers, the learning group also acts as a forum for dialogue on the implementation of the strategy papers and the involvement of the United Nations system in the process. A group bringing focal points from various bilateral agencies has also been created.

19. To ensure a common understanding and approach, a series of consultations on the poverty reduction strategy papers have also been held in Africa, including two regional workshops in Addis Ababa and Abidjan, co-sponsored ECA and the African Development Bank, respectively. Meetings were also held with other partners, including representatives from the European Union, other donors, United Nations agencies, including UNDP, FAO and the International Labour Organization, and the non-governmental organization

community in the United States of America, Europe and Africa.

20. In the five countries where the comprehensive development framework has been introduced, the common country assessment has been used by the framework partner groups, which includes United Nations agencies, to define strategies and programmes for the framework, as well as for inputs to the poverty reduction strategy papers. The acceptance of the common country assessment as a common document is expected to reduce the steps in the programming process of individual organizations of the United Nations system, saving the time of all partners, including Governments. UNDP has reduced the requirements for the formulation of country programmes by no longer requiring an advisory note. UNFPA has also instructed its field representatives to use the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, where they are appropriate, instead of its own programming tools and has adjusted its own country population assessment, expecting that most of that analysis has already been covered in the common country assessment. Where these frameworks have been in place, a few countries were able to quickly put interim poverty reduction strategy papers in place based on the comprehensive development framework. In addition to being the basis for concessional assistance under the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility — formerly the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility — the interim strategy papers have been used in a few countries by the World Bank as part of its country assistance strategy and will be used by the United Nations family as inputs to the second generation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks.

21. The harmonization of programme cycles and the integration of agency programmes and procedures is an important aspect of programme coherence. Considerable progress has been made in this area but more needs to be done. Those agencies with country programmes ending in 1999 and 2000 are implementing bridging programmes until they can synchronize them to fit into the harmonized cycle and to coincide with national development and sectoral plans. Along with the synchronization of programming cycles, the harmonization and simplification of rules and procedures in the areas of programming, implementation and administration would reduce the transaction costs for national Governments and improve their ability to implement programmes supported by the United Nations system while at the same time promoting coherence among United Nations agencies. Towards that end, the United Nations Development Group will issue common guidelines on joint programming and joint mid-term reviews by mid-2000.

B. Ownership of development assistance

22. The Council recommended that:

At the same time, the role of different stakeholders, namely, Governments, parliaments and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, in the implementation of various programmes and initiatives needs to be clearly recognized and defined.

23. Having established the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework as coordination mechanisms, the United Nations system has begun identifying and addressing the next wave of challenges. The most important of these is the need to continue efforts to ensure and improve government participation. The country-driven nature of the two exercises leads to the participation of Governments in all aspects of these processes.

24. Although it is too early to assess the impact of these two mechanisms, most country teams report enhanced collaboration with local stakeholders, including Governments. In general, the resident coordinators and representatives of the key organizations of the United Nations system with operational activities work closely with Governments and have regular contacts with a variety of trade unions, private sector organizations and other non-governmental organizations. The AIDS thematic group, for example, has generally been working well with non-governmental organizations and attempts are being made by most country teams to expand thematic groups to include government agencies, civil society organizations, including the media, and private sector groups.

25. A few agencies have begun to involve non-governmental organizations in their programme review and formulation. For the first time, in 1999, representatives of non-governmental organizations

participated in the programme review of UNICEF, along with the Government of Mauritius, which gave them a broad overview and vision of the programmes and activities of UNICEF in the country. Also, UNFPA has, more generally, involved local non-governmental organizations in the formulation and finalization of its reproductive health subprogramme, including, along with government ministries, implementing UNFPA-funded component projects for adolescents and youth and disadvantaged groups. The United Nations Special Initiative, in its governance cluster, has encouraged the participation of civil society organizations at the country and intercountry level within the context of the African Governance Forum series. With the holding of African Governance Forums I, II and III, 48 non-governmental organizations have taken part so far.

26. Most organizations of the United Nations system are relying increasingly on local stakeholders, for the execution of their programmes although the modalities for doing so vary. The use of local stakeholders is quite extensive in Ethiopia, for example, where UNDP and, recently, UNFPA have applied 100 per cent national execution to implement projects and programmes. This has been helped by a programme funded by the International Organization for Migration, which continues to fund the return of skilled Ethiopians as part of its programme to promote local capacities. Similarly, in Eritrea, national execution continues to be the principal modality for the implementation of projects and programmes. In 1999, over 70 per cent of UNDP programmes were nationally executed. FAO projects are also executed nationally with FAO backstopping and support.

27. UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF have achieved excellent results using local non-governmental organizations to execute local projects. Not surprisingly, the use of civil society organizations in particular has been more uniform and widespread in the areas of education, health, including reproductive health, and environmental sanitation, and in conflict zones, emergency food assistance and, to some extent, rehabilitation. There has also been strong collaboration with non-governmental organizations in national elections, including in civic education and monitoring. Collaboration with non-governmental organizations has been useful because it has given community leaders the opportunity to contribute to the development of their own communities, enhance their capacities and further intensify their collaboration with the Government.

28. Despite progress in this area, the critical challenge remains to involve all stakeholders in the implementation of technical programmes in the majority of countries. While this has been possible in some countries, the lack of capacity has limited the more widespread use of this modality. Many United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions include in their national activities national capacity-building for programmes and project formulation, implementation and evaluation as a way of strengthening institutional capacity. To make full use of their involvement, country teams in a number of countries are undertaking in-depth capacity assessments of non-governmental organizations in order to determine their capacity levels and the additional support that would be required to promote local ownership and capacity for implementing United Nations-supported programmes in their countries. In Liberia, such a study provided useful information on how local non-governmental organizations would participate in the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction process.

29. In a few countries, expanded contact with civil society organizations is discouraged and the movement for popular participation is still somewhat weak. Where requested, United Nations agencies are assisting Governments in developing a national legal framework for non-governmental organization activities.

30. The Council noted that:

The enhancement of ownership in recipient countries should be facilitated through efforts by members of the resident coordinator system and other external partners in development to build the capacity of recipient countries to set their own strategies and to coordinate programmes themselves, including hosting consultative group meetings, where appropriate.

31. Ownership of development is only meaningful and real when countries have the capacity to formulate policy and manage development assistance, including coordination. It implies that the recipient country has the capacity to analyse the agenda of various development partners, identify areas of mutual interest and synthesize them in a way that is acceptable to all partners, and implement and evaluate programmes. While efforts to expand country ownership have increased, there is much room for progress in this area,

especially as regards the active participation of Governments in coordination meetings. However, stronger government leadership is being encouraged by the World Bank by having government representatives serve as chairpersons of coordination meetings, which include the majority of resident donor organizations covering all major sectors and themes. Towards that end, the Governments of Ghana and Malawi hosted consultative group meetings for the first time in 1999 and 2000, respectively.

32. The formulation of sector-wide approaches in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Ethiopia and Uganda has fostered country ownership, with various partners supporting a single policy thrust as articulated by the Government. The health sector in Ghana is a good example of this approach and has led to the establishment of innovative funding mechanisms such as the common pooling of funds, which can be accessed by the Ministry of Health, with due care taken for transparency.

33. Weakness in institutional capacity and statistical data limitations are two of the main constraints to the full ownership of development assistance. Along with other partners, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has been providing technical assistance to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enhance the capacity of units within the Governments to better coordinate and mobilize development assistance. However, this kind of technical support is not widespread and government capacity for policy formulation remains limited in a significant number of countries.

C. Global and regional coordination of initiatives on Africa

34. The Council recommended:

The strengthening of the existing coordination arrangements at the global and regional levels. ACC should more effectively ensure that inter-agency consultations are consolidated to facilitate the coordination and harmonization of Africa-related initiatives. In addition, ACC should consider broadening the coverage of countries and the clusters of priority areas to reflect the original commitments in the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

35. For the United Nations system, the framework for global coordination is the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, which is a compact of mutually agreed commitments between African Governments and the international community on the priority areas critical to promoting recovery, growth and sustainable development of Africa. The report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318) and its follow-up by the United Nations system is also considered to be a framework for addressing some of the same key priority areas but in a more integrated holistic manner, with the goal of not just economic recovery and development but also a durable peace.

36. In playing its global advocacy role, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs functions as, among other things, a point of coordination, at the global level, for the preparation of reports on Africa which include analysis of the implementation of initiatives for Africa. In order to facilitate harmonization in the implementation of initiatives, detailed information on Africa-related initiatives is required. This is being done and will be available on the Internet on the Special Initiative's web site (www.unsia.org).

37. The United Nations Development Group also serves to facilitate the coordination and harmonization of the various Africa initiatives to the extent that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and its coordination mechanisms, such as the thematic groups, integrate elements of the various programmes and initiatives of bilateral development agencies.

38. In response to the recommendation of the Secretary-General and the adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, the first annual regional coordination meeting of United Nations agencies in Africa was held in Nairobi on 5 March 1999; it was presided over by the Deputy Secretary-General. At the meeting, it was decided that the Special Initiative provisionally constituted an appropriate mechanism for the coordination of the United Nations system's work in Africa. This arrangement will be reviewed after two years. The ACC Steering

Committee on the Special Initiative, at its eighth meeting, in May 1999, discussed in detail a draft proposal on how the Special Initiative could play an expanded coordination role. The report, which took account of the ACC Steering Committee's discussion, was submitted to the Deputy Secretary-General in June 1999. Based on the report, the Deputy Secretary-General submitted a set of recommendations aimed at promoting more collaborative actions, reinforcing synergies, avoiding duplication and overlap, and generally bringing greater coherence to the work of the United Nations system in Africa, with the Steering Committee providing a common framework for overseeing the effort.

39. At its second regular session of 1999, on 29 and 30 October, the Administrative Committee on Coordination endorsed the thrust of those recommendations. ACC further recommended that coordinating agencies of the clusters ensure the inclusiveness of all United Nations system activities in existing clusters. ACC also expressed its commitment to further streamline inter-agency arrangements and ensure that the Special Initiative and existing country-level coordination tools such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the common country assessment were made mutually reinforcing.

40. The second regional consultation is scheduled to be held in Addis Ababa, on 26 and 27 June 2000. The objectives of the meeting are to facilitate information sharing on the Special Initiative activities through cluster reporting and to identify a set of monitorable indicators and benchmarks on the basis of which systematic cluster-level reporting could be done on progress towards enhanced United Nations system-wide collaboration in priority areas under the Special Initiative. Key aspects of this stocktaking will include goal-setting and consensus-building around the programmatic content of the United Nations system's collaborative work in priority areas. Equally important will be an assessment of how this work contributes to meeting broad international goals and specific region-level African priorities.

41. The Council recommended that:

Thematic consultations among all development partners be held under the chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, with the involvement of the Organization of African Unity and African regional and subregional economic communities, including the African Economic Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Southern African Development Community and the Arab Maghreb Union. During these consultations, common priorities at the policy and operational levels should be discussed with a view to encouraging donor agencies and countries to streamline and rationalize their respective development assistance activities.

42. Some progress is being made in the area of coordination at the regional level. Information technology for development, which is a major theme under the Special Initiative, was the subject of the first African Development Forum, which took place in Addis Ababa from 24 to 28 October 1999, and was opened by the Deputy Secretary-General. A post-Forum summit will be held in September 2000 in South Africa, to which multilateral and bilateral development agencies have been invited. HIV/AIDS will be the subject of the second Forum, which is scheduled for October 2000. Various organizations and agencies of the United Nations system continue to work with the regional and subregional organizations in their respective areas of competence in defining common priorities at the policy and operational levels. It is expected that, in the near future, there will be greater participation by donor agencies.

43. The Council requested that:

The Secretary-General commission an independent evaluation of the performance of the New Agenda, including its relationship with other relevant initiatives.

44. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries, ECA and the Africa Recovery Unit of the Department of Public Information have jointly engaged in monitoring the implementation of the New Agenda. A meeting of the three entities is scheduled for June 2000. The objective of the meeting is, among other things, to initiate discussions on the commissioning of the independent evaluation of the New Agenda and to outline the main elements for the terms of reference for the consultant.

45. The Council also requested that:

> **The Secretary-General submit to the Council at its high-level segment on African development, to be scheduled before 2002, a report outlining, among other things, the progress achieved in strengthening African capacity to coordinate international development assistance at the country level and at the subregional and regional levels, and in developing country-specific as well as comprehensive coordination mechanisms.**

46. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries will take the lead in preparing the report, with inputs from the United Nations Development Group and the Special Initiative secretariat. It is expected that the report will be ready by June 2001.

III. Conclusion

47. While it is still too early for a full assessment of United Nations reform in the area of coordination and harmonization, especially in Africa, it is clear that significant improvements have been made that have strengthened the overall contribution of the United Nations system to development in the region. It has also been effective in bridging the communication gap and creating a spirit of collaboration and a sense of common purpose. The thematic groups have been particularly effective in advancing the programme approach, while ensuring greater complementarity and a clearer division of labour between the agencies, including the Bretton Woods institutions, with institutions with greater comparative advantage assuming coordination functions. However, while the theme groups have helped to draw multilateral and bilateral development agencies into a common framework with the same goals and strategies, additional efforts are required from all concerned to avoid duplication, enhance transparency and ensure that mutual reinforcement among activities is a key consideration in programme implementation.

48. The harmonization and simplification of procedures and rules among the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other development partners, in particular the bilateral development agencies, is critical for improved coordination and harmonization. As countries move towards sector-wide programming, the burden on countries to satisfy each participating partner's accounting and reporting rules will increase. More work needs to be done in this area, especially as regards finance and administration, including identifying the best approaches and lessons learned.

49. The implementation of national execution as the preferred modality for programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system (see General Assembly resolution 47/199, para. 15) deserves considerable attention. The interpretation and implementation of procedures of national execution is not uniform in the system, in spite of the recent adoption by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions of revised guidelines. The main difficulties have to do with administrative arrangements and diversity of rules and procedures. As stressed in the new guidelines, the focus should be on strengthening national management capacities, including financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and auditing in order to enable Governments to manage fully development efforts and achieve self-reliance, while ensuring accountability.

50. Improved coordination frameworks, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, the Special Initiative and the comprehensive development framework, have great potential for the better management of programmes but there is still a need to clarify and strengthen the links among them. It is also important to stress that the effects of declining core resources, and their negative impact on human resources required to monitor programme implementation, may undermine the initial successes achieved thus far.

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Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy

Contribution of the Economic Commission for Africa to the theme for the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council

Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy

A regional perspective

Summary

The President of the Economic and Social Council for the year 2000, in consultation with the Bureau, requested the regional commissions to hold regional intergovernmental or expert group meetings on information technology for development in their respective regions and to report on the outcome of these meetings to the high-level segment of the Council in order to provide a regional perspective on the theme for the high-level segment, entitled "Development and international cooperation in the twenty-first century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy".

All five regional commissions have submitted brief reports based on regional consultative meetings or on views solicited from their member States. The meetings of the ESCAP and ECLAC regions were hosted by the Governments of India and Brazil, respectively, on 20 and 21 June 2000. For its part, ECA held a high-level meeting, as the first African Development Forum, from 24 to 28 October 1999 under

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the theme "The challenge to Africa of globalization and the information age". ESCWA held its expert group meeting on 15 and 16 May 2000. ECE circulated a draft report to all its member States and comments received are integrated in the Commission's report to the Council.

African Development Forum '99: the challenge to Africa of globalization and the information age

Background

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) held a regional meeting with representatives of member States, as well as other major stakeholders in African development, on the role of information technology in accelerating African development. The meeting was convened as the first African Development Forum from 24 to 28 October 1999 under the theme "The challenge to Africa of globalization and the information age".

2. The issue of globalization and the information age was chosen for the inaugural African Development Forum because of the importance of defining African-owned and African-led strategies to engage with the global information economy.

3. The major goal of the Forum was to develop and support African initiatives fundamental to the shaping of the African information age. The Forum provided the first occasion for a broad range of African policy makers to come together to assess the opportunities, confront the challenges and develop a plan of action for Africa in the information age. It was also the culmination of more than three years of activities to build an African information society and the occasion to set future directions for the African Information Society Initiative (AISI).[1] The Forum was unique because, for the first time, it demonstrated how much was being done in Africa, by Africans, in harnessing information and communication technologies (ICTs) towards development. Much was already under way, and yet it was not well known even within Africa itself. Some of the most vibrant and innovative applications of ICTs for development occupied centre stage during the Forum.

Attendance

4. The Forum was attended by some 950 participants from Governments, the private sector, civil society (including the academic sector and the media) and bilateral and multilateral organizations. Of all the participants that came to the Forum, 81 per cent were from the African region, 10 per cent from Europe, 6 per cent from North America and 2 per cent from elsewhere. Some 36 per cent were from the African public sector, 15 per cent from non-governmental organizations, 13 per cent from universities and research institutions, 15 per cent from the private sector and 15 per cent from development agencies (10 per cent listed their institution as "other").

Opening

5. The Forum had two opening sessions, one on the evening of 24 October 1999 and another on the morning of 25 October. Speakers at the first session, which considered the broad issues of the African development challenge, included Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Louise Frechette, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity Salim Ahmed Salim, Vice-President of the African Development Bank Ahmed Bahgat and ECA Executive Secretary K. Y. Amoako.

6. The speakers set the scene by highlighting domestic private sector development, science and technology and good governance as key requirements for African progress. They emphasized the need for a new paradigm for the continent's development based on a vibrant domestic private sector, a strong State, cutting-edge policy analysis and good governance.

7. The opening plenary on 25 October featured keynote presentations underlining the development opportunities of the information age in Africa. Speakers included Louise Frechette, Noah Samara and K. Y. Amoako.

8. In her keynote address, the Deputy Secretary-General stated that knowledge was the new global asset, the very premise of progress. However, in harnessing ICTs for development we must beware of creating a digital divide between the information-rich and the information-poor. ICTs were not a luxury, but rather a tool for economic and social development. She identified the spread of ICTs as perhaps the most

[1] The African Information Society Initiative was adopted in May 1996 by resolution 812 (XXXI) of the ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for economic and social development planning. Since that time, it has provided the framework for the ECA programme on harnessing information for development.

important force spurring globalization along. Those ICTs were a tremendous force for integrating people and nations into the global economy. They could promote openness and transparency, leaving polluters and dictators fewer places to hide. The United Nations system, she said, would continue to do its part, particularly through the work of ECA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The ADF provided a forum to bring partners together. The challenge was for Africa to craft its own links to the global information economy.

9. Noah Samara, Chief Executive Officer of WorldSpace Corporation, told participants that information affluence was the *sine qua non* to development. Over the past 15 years, he said, the industrialized world had shifted its focus from connecting people to connecting nodes of information which people could universally access, share and grow. Focus on convergence technologies had brought information affluence — unprecedented benefit and wealth resulting from networked media. To bring that affluence to Africa, he proposed that the Forum's participants should focus their collective energies on establishing 5 million Internet terminals in 5 million villages and neighbourhoods over the next five years.

10. The Executive Secretary of ECA spelled out his vision of an African renaissance spurred by information technology. Intelligent public policies, he stressed, were critical to making the shift from agriculture and manufacturing to information-based economies that employed innovation and technologically advanced applications. Such policies should be goal-focused, carefully monitored, long-term and intelligently led. They should address education, and, in particular, science and technology.

11. In the session on "Progress towards the African information age" the Director of the Development Information Services Division of ECA, set the scene for the work of the conference by briefing participants on AISI, stressing the importance of national information and communication infrastructure (NICI) policy processes and introducing the four themes of the Forum, which were:

(a) Globalization and the information economy;

(b) Strengthening Africa's information infrastructure;

(c) Information and communication technologies for improved governance;

(d) Democratizing access to the information society.

12. The programme proceeded for four days of plenary and breakout sessions, workshops, focus groups, feedback sessions, special panels, poster sessions, an information marketplace and an exhibit. (The full text of the report of the Forum is available at http://www.un.org/depts/eca/adf.)

13. A unique part of the conference, which contributed to the success of the conference and which is crucial to its follow-up, was the formation of focus groups of major stakeholders on the issue of information technology for African development. There were focus groups on gender, the private sector, academia, the African diaspora and youth. Formed prior to the Forum, these groups met in session during the Forum and provided regular feedback to the plenary.

14. Participants presented their recommendations and conclusions to the Forum in the context of what they called "The way forward to a people-centred African information society". Their point of departure was the basic right to communicate and to participate in society, which required equity of access to and use of ICTs. There was explicit recognition of the gravity of the digital divide, whereby many women, many young people, the disabled and many rural and marginal urban communities in Africa were distant from the advantages offered by ICTs.

Importance of national policies

15. The participants saw the development and consolidation of NICI policies and plans as fundamental to the African information society. The national level provided the platform for making strategic choices on, for example, regulation, infrastructural priorities and service distribution. As the success of NICI efforts to date had been based on the inclusionary nature of the process, including as many stakeholders as possible, they stressed the need for its continuance, with efforts made to ensure private sector involvement.

16. While stressing the national level, strong emphasis was placed on the need to work for regional integration, as the enhancement of scale would do much to accelerate the building of an African information infrastructure. Cooperation at the

subregional and regional levels was also an essential part of the policy and regulatory frameworks. Additionally, ICTs were tools that could be used to facilitate regional economic integration.

Forum recommendations

17. The principal recommendations made during the Forum, following its themes as well as its stakeholder groups, are outlined below.

Globalization and the information economy

18. To join the information economy and to address barriers to e-commerce in Africa, participants felt that Africa must do the following:

(a) Combine economies of scale with competition;

(b) Improve local skills to cope with the brain drain problem;

(c) Encourage subregional cooperation;

(d) Establish a stable framework for investment;

(e) Develop the capacity to present and defend African positions in global forums, such as the World Trade Organization.

They felt that Governments needed to develop reliable statistical indicators to facilitate the process of planning the information economy and monitoring impact and performance. Governments needed clear information economy strategies in partnership with the private sector. They felt that the global multinational private sector could create partnerships with African small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs).

Information and communication technologies for improved governance

19. Participants felt that ICTS for improved governance could support four areas especially: reducing poverty; meeting basic human needs; improving public administration; and enhancing democratization.

20. Their recommendations in that area were to do the following:

(a) Develop applications that fit priority areas for development, including job creation, agricultural information systems, human resource development and health;

(b) Establish good communication channels between decision makers and professionals;

(c) Design systems for capturing indigenous knowledge;

(d) Promote the sharing of information and resources among African countries through joint pilot projects, replications of best practices and the establishment of regional and subregional frameworks.

Strengthening Africa's information infrastructure

21. Participants showed a commitment to follow-up actions related to policy and infrastructure development. They felt that policies and regulations should create an environment conducive to innovation, competition and investment. There was a need to strengthen autonomous regulatory bodies which actively involved all stakeholders and balanced diverse interests.

22. Specific recommendations included the following:

(a) Mobilizing local investment for ICTs and networks at all levels from global corporations to communities;

(b) Capacity-building for inclusive and effective policy formulation and regulation;

(c) Creation of new and expansion of existing African investment funds for rural and subregional development;

(d) Subregional cooperation on equipment selection, procurement, deployment and related areas;

(e) Enhanced African participation in Internet governance at the regional and international levels.

Democratizing access to the information society

23. Participants felt that school networking and distance learning were essential to broadening access to the information society. They also recommended the following:

(a) Promotion and protection of indigenous knowledge through ICTs;

(b) Using intermediaries, such as information brokers, to broaden access;

(c) Integrating old and new information technologies;

(d) Facilitating cooperative, public access to ICTs.

24. The stakeholder groups stressed a number of areas for follow-up. The *youth group* recommended an on-line youth forum, the development of an African youth action plan through national youth forums, collaboration of African youth with youth elsewhere in the South and African content development, with emphasis on youth.

25. For ICTs to be an empowering tool for development, the *gender group* said that it was essential for women to participate effectively in ICT decision-making processes, including NICI development and that ICT applications, products and services needed to be designed to meet the specific needs of African women. They also wanted ICTs used to strengthen women's entrepreneurship and for women entrepreneurs to engage actively in the information economy. They recommended education and training in science and technology for young African women. ICTs could be used to enhance African women's capacity to speak out and support one another, they noted. The group also advocated the establishment of mechanisms to guarantee gender equity in ICT planning, projects and programmes as well as research on the impact of ICTs on women and their struggle for equality.

26. The *African diaspora group* was eager to have African Governments welcome their participation and support in meeting strategic goals. They felt that that could happen through the creation of an enabling environment and incentives for investment and trade. They voiced their intention to create a virtual forum of African experts in the diaspora to advise African decision makers and indicated that they would explore modalities of using diaspora expertise to support Africa's interests in global forums, such as the International Telecommunication Union, the World Trade Organization and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. They thought that they could be useful in mobilizing support for African ICT development efforts in Europe and North America.

27. The *academic group* recommended the development of institutional capacity for training policy makers, analysts and researchers on the role and the use of ICTs in development. At the regional level, they wanted to see the development of methodologies for impact assessment of national policies relating to ICTs and other policy issues, with a view to promoting transparency and accountability in governance and regional cooperation.

28. The *private sector group* felt that dialogue and debate within the African private sector and the global private sector was needed in order to enhance Africa's effectiveness in global forums. They advocated setting targets for creating employment in the information economy, focusing on intangible goods and services. To make that successful, the knowledge, education and training required for the information economy needed to be redefined. They felt that new instruments were needed to support the capital needs of the African private sector, including venture capital funds and the restructuring of available financing from the regional and international financial institutions.

29. In his concluding address, the Executive Secretary of ECA highlighted some of the main points of the Forum. He found the promise of ICT immense, with profound ramifications for education, commerce, bringing societies and nations closer together and relating Africa to the world. At the same time, it was not a panacea. African decision makers had to make careful policy choices that would provide the necessary human and financial investment. He stressed the importance of Africa producing content for the new technologies, related to health, education, e-commerce, culture, civil society, business and other topics. He emphasized the need for African leaders to understand the import of decisions being made outside of Africa and the importance of preparing regional positions to defend African interests in global decision arenas. He underscored how new forms of communication and information management could aid in democratizing society, with the widespread involvement of youth, women, the poor and rural people. To accomplish that, he stressed, required the involvement of the broadest possible spectrum of African society in the creation and management of ICT systems. He felt that the participants at the Forum showed a broad, informed and often passionate desire to make a real difference in Africa's development with the aid of ICT. He pledged the willingness of ECA to work together with them to hasten the day when the intelligent ICT community had more of a role in shaping society.

Results of the Forum

30. Results of the evaluation of the Forum indicate that it succeeded in bringing the issue of information technology and development to the participants. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents to the evaluation said that the Forum had helped them to identify suitable policy options in that area for their countries. Additionally, 89.2 per cent of participants said that they felt the conference had achieved its objectives. Ninety-seven per cent of those who responded to the evaluation questionnaire said that they would undertake activities to follow up their participation in the conference.

31. A unique aspect of the synergies of the Forum on globalization and the information age in Africa was that it resulted in a number of initiatives independent of the formal programme that participants met on and agreed to follow up. Among these were Schoolnet Africa, Biz2BizNet, Beijing+5 Women's Networking Activities, NGOnet Africa Civil Society ICT Network Initiative, Telecentre Network, Alliance for African Business, African Digital Diaspora activities, Malawi ADF National Plan of Action, African Distance Learning Programme, Youth Network, and Gaia: Global Access Information Agency. Details of these initiatives are available in the report of the Forum, available at *http://www.un.org/Depts/eca/adf*

Post-Forum Summit

32. ECA is following up the Forum with a post-Forum Summit to present to the highest levels of leadership the strategies that Forum participants considered to be among the most promising. To accelerate African development through the increased use of information and communication technologies, the Summit will examine an overall strategy that targets the key development sectors of education and youth, health and small business development along with the overall policy changes that are needed to underpin the transformation.

33. From the post-Forum Summit, ECA expects the following:

(a) Commitment from all partners (Governments, subregional organizations, the private sector and the development community) to work together to enhance the value to the African region as a whole of specific information society initiatives;

(b) Agreement from Governments to champion the African information society;

(c) Commitment from subregional economic organizations to build policy frameworks to enhance the impact of national information society policies;

(d) Increased public debate within countries on information society issues.

34. Once the commitment has been made, it is anticipated that much of the remainder of the strategy will fall into place as each African nation and subregion carves its own unique path towards the overall goals of an African information society.